

As chairman of the Senate Committee on Veteran's Affairs, I would like to take a moment to discuss the importance of suicide prevention and ways in which we can all help our Nation's veterans cope with the invisible wounds of war.

Serving in defense of our Nation, particularly during a time of war, can place tremendous strains on servicemen and women, sometimes leading to mental health conditions ranging from mild depression to severe post-traumatic stress disorder. These conditions are reasonable reactions to very abnormal situations.

While behavioral health conditions rarely lead to suicide, it is clear the consequences of failing to properly address and treat these conditions are dire. According to a report released earlier this year by the Department of Veterans Affairs, 22 veterans take their own lives each day. This is tragic and unacceptable.

For veterans and their families struggling with mental health conditions, there is hope. Help is available through VA and dozens of non-profit organizations who have made it their mission to serve those who have served our Nation.

VA has made great strides to improve its suicide prevention efforts. As of June, the Department has hired over 1,600 new mental health professionals to provide care and treatment to our veterans. These added positions are essential as VA works to meet the requirements established by Congress to provide initial mental health evaluations within 24 hours and comprehensive evaluations within 14 days of a veteran's request. Moreover, VA has put a priority on patient-centered care, which includes mental health as part of primary care and involves family members in the treatment process.

Additionally, VA operates the Veterans Crisis Line, a critical resource for veterans and their loved ones. The Veterans Crisis Line is a toll-free, confidential resource that connects veterans in distress with qualified, caring VA responders. Family members and friends can also use this resource to learn how to recognize the signs of suicide, speak to a suicide prevention coordinator, and receive information regarding the services available in their area.

The Veterans Crisis Line has a history of success. Approximately 93 percent of all Veterans Crisis Line referrals are made to callers with a history of using VA health care facilities in the

past 12 months. Veterans who call the hotline are more likely to access intervention and treatment services following a rescue through the hotline. More importantly, those who have been rescued or received a referral for follow up care have a reduced rate of repeated suicide attempts over a 12-month period.

In addition to VA, veteran service organizations, non-profit organizations, and local health care providers can also help. In my home State of Vermont, the Vermont Veterans Outreach Program, operated by the Vermont National Guard, has played a critical role in supporting the needs of Guard members and veterans, and helping to prevent suicide. I am proud to have secured the initial funding to establish this program in 2007 and am thankful for their efforts. Aside from working directly with veterans and their families to determine their needs, the outreach program provides a liaison to help these individuals better navigate the VA system. Team members meet frequently with VA officials to ensure they are aware of any new VA initiatives in order to better inform veterans and their families of the options for care and support available. The Vermont Veterans Outreach Program has helped countless veterans return from war to become successful contributing members of their communities. I am tremendously proud of the outreach programs' work and am pleased other States have begun similar programs.

Just as these organizations provide assistance, friends and family can also ensure veterans receive the help they need. We must each be aware of the signs, symptoms, and risk factors of suicide. We must not be afraid to take action to assist friends and neighbors in crisis. Suicide is preventable and we all have a role to play. Providing support can mean lending a compassionate ear, listening for concerning answers, and guiding veterans to resources that can help.

Even one veteran taking his or her life is too many. As a long standing advocate for veterans, I will continue to work to counter issues that prevent veterans and their families from seeking care, such as the stigma surrounding mental illness, negative perceptions of treatment and other barriers that may result in prematurely dropping out of treatment.

I ask that my colleagues join me in committing themselves to ensuring that the brave men and women who have worn our Nation's uniform receive

timely access to high quality mental health care. Our veterans have already sacrificed so much in defense of our country. They should not be left to fend for themselves when coping with the invisible wounds of war.

Mr. TESTER. I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 262) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

ORDERS FOR FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2013

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 9:30 a.m. on Friday, September 27, 2013; that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, and the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day; that following any leader remarks, the Senate resume consideration of H.J. Res. 59, the continuing resolution, under the previous order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. TESTER. And that the filing deadline for all second-degree amendments to the joint resolution be 10:30 a.m. tomorrow.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PROGRAM

Mr. TESTER. There will be up to four rollcall votes at 12:30 p.m. tomorrow.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 9:30 A.M. TOMORROW

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent it adjourn under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 7:01 p.m., adjourned until Friday, September 27, 2013, at 9:30 a.m.